

## The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

### Ohio State Engineer

**Title:** The Engineer's Bookshelf

**Creators:** Dumble, Wilson R.

**Issue Date:** 1944-05

**Publisher:** Ohio State University, College of Engineering

**Citation:** Ohio State Engineer, vol. 27, no. 6 (May, 1944), 18-20.

**URI:** <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/36084>

# The Engineer's Bookshelf . . .

By WILSON R. DUMBLE

I HAVE just finished reading Mr. Moss Hart's new play about the Army Air Corps. He calls it WINGED VICTORY; and although WINGED VICTORY is more of a pageant than a play, it nevertheless has in it all the elements that go to make up what we commonly call the dramatic. If WINGED VICTORY is as stirring on the stage as it is on the printed page, I feel quite sure that it will be running for many months at the 44th Street Theatre, where this very evening, the three hundred members of the cast, most of them from the Armed Forces, will be making merry.

Let us call WINGED VICTORY a war play with a civilian background, because it accents the story of pilot training in the Army Air Force, with a few civilian characters always forming a backdrop.

It is such an exciting play—so right in every scene and detail—that it is almost impossible to believe that it was written to order against an Army deadline.

General Arnold sent for Mr. Hart, and told him what he wanted: a play that would give the story of the expansion of the American Air Force, and that should be produced in the Fall of 1943 for the benefit of the Army Relief Fund. An Army bomber and its crew were put at Hart's disposal. He flew 28,000 miles for his research and background material. He ate, slept, and flew with Air Force men, took their tests with them, shared in the triumphs and disappointments of their training courses. He returned to New York on a Friday and began his play the following Monday morning. Six weeks later the complete script was on General Arnold's desk. In other words, WINGED VICTORY is exactly what the doctor ordered.

WINGED VICTORY tells the story of the life and training of six young American lads. You first see the three of them in their homes in Mapleton, Ohio—Mapleton is that mythical Ohio town also used in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*—where they are waiting for letters ordering them to report for training. One is a young banker, another a chemist, and the third a barber. By the next scene these three lads have arrived at camp where they have met up with three other men, also there for training. Mr. Hart carefully places the home of one of them in Oregon, another one in Brooklyn, and the last one in Texas. Yes, all corners of the country are represented.

Then, you will witness these men going through their paces: you will hear them singing *Off I go, into the Wild Blue Yonder* in a barrack street at an induction training center; you will sympathize with them when they appear before a faculty board of six officers who are attending to the terrible process of washing out some of the men; you will see them in lecture halls and examination rooms; you will tingle with pride when they all gather at a hangar on the flying line after their first night solo flights; you will thrill with them taking the oath of office on that day of days when they are presented their highly prized wings; you will weep with them as their banter is turned to sorrow during a tense moment when one of their buddies fails to return from a training flight; you will know what they talk about during their last precious hour in America before hopping off for the Islands; and you will see their wives and sweethearts waiting, waiting, waiting in a poorly furnished bedroom of a broken down hotel at Oakland, California, just across the Bay. Ladies and gentlemen, I imagine you will know more about the Army Air Force after you have read WINGED VICTORY than you have ever known before.

Let me quote you some of the lines. Here is a little speech that one of the soldiers at the Induction Center gives to the newly arrived rookies. If I recall correctly, this is typical of all-time Army men—Air Corps or Infantry or what you will. Whitey, a six weeks rookie is speaking:

"Join the Air Corps! See the Garden Spot—of Mississippi! To the right, gentlemen, is Pneumonia Gulch—that is where we sleep. You fry by day, you freeze by night. To the left—just a little ways—just a mile and a half—is Ptomaine Tavern. That is where we eat. The wheat cakes we leave are used as depth bombs by the Navy. And the planes, you ask? Where are the planes? Ah, gentlemen—they can be seen at night—in the movies!

"But what about that beautiful poster, with the beautiful pilot, in the beautiful Fortress? Well, we have a little song here that tells it far better than any words of mine. It goes: 'We joined the Air Corps to fly machines, and all we do is clean latrines!' Gentlemen, I will greet you there at six o'clock tomorrow morning, and while you scrub and polish I will say to you: 'Look proud—you are the future pilots!' It will not be easy to look proud at that hour of the morning, doing your particular work, but

remember the hand that holds the mop will some day run a Fortress. This is how it all starts. And that poster, gentleman, was a damned lie."

Here is a good scene. Pinky Scariano is appearing before the faculty members. This dialogue takes place between Pinky and Major Halper. Pinky speaks first.

PINKY

Aviation student Daniel Scariano reporting, sir.

MAJOR HALPER

Sit down, please. (Pinky does so.) Mr. Scariano, I'm pretty sure you know why you're here today.

PINKY

Yes, sir.

MAJOR HALPER

I want you to know that every member of this Board is keenly aware of the disappointment you must feel. You've made a fine showing. Your Squad Leader came to see me personally about you. Did you know that?

PINKY

Yes, sir.

MAJOR HALPER

On the basis of your fine record I had you put through for a special check. We don't usually do that when the results of the first one are so positive. But I feel you ought to have even that slight chance. The result was the same. I'm afraid we just can't pass you. I'm sorry. (Pinky is silent.) Is there anything you wish to say to us?

PINKY

Yes! Why did they let me come this far? Why didn't they kick me out before? I took a perception test when I first joined up. I took another one at Camp. And one at college. Why didn't they tell me then? Why do they let me get this far and then wash me out?

MAJOR HALPER

Yes, Scariano, you're quite right. That shouldn't be. We're doing all we can to avoid just that. But you see, those doctors are under great pressure. They're examining hundreds, day in, day out. And they're human. They get tired and careless and pass some quite obvious cases that should have been caught at the beginning. You know that, Scariano, as well as I do.

(But Pinky doesn't answer. He is crying unashamedly, the tears rolling down his face.)

PINKY

I'm sorry, sir, I can't help it.

MAJOR HALPER

Sure. Go right ahead. Don't be ashamed,

Scariano. Lots of fellows do it. Got a handkerchief?

PINKY

No, sir.

MAJOR HALPER

Here—catch. (He tosses him his own handkerchief.) Look, Scariano—why don't you go into my office and sit there a while? There's nobody there now. It's right through this door. (He comes from behind the table and opens a door.)

PINKY

Thank you, sir. I'm sorry to be such a baby—but I can't help it, sir!

MAJOR HALPER

Sure. (He watches Pinky out and closes the door carefully before he turns back to the others.) Let's take a five-minute break and have a cigarette, huh? I just haven't got the guts to tell any more of those.

Although Pinky is washed out, he does go to a gunnery school, and he even beats Allan and Frankie into action in the Islands. Before Allan leaves the States, he receives this interesting letter from Pinky:

"Dear Allan and Frankie and the rest. Well, I suppose by the time *this* letter reaches you, you'll all be Hot Pilots dangling those parachutes from your behinds like medals. I'd sure love to get a load of you. As for myself, I am now at advance gunnery school, and all I can say is, it shouldn't happen to a dog. As you can see by the Letterhead, we are right out in the middle of the desert, and it's so hot they don't bother with stoves—they fry the eggs right on the guns to save time. The nearest town is 62 miles away and has a population of 300—all Indians. Makes it very nice for week-ends. The women all look like shoe leather, and *my* shape is better than any woman's I've seen since we got here. We have a swell bunch of officers and they are very nice to us. Last week a case of Coca-Cola arrived—the first one—and they let us watch them drink it. Sometimes after they have taken showers and used up all the water in Camp, they let us watch them drying off, too. It's very cooling. The Service Club looks like an old parrot cage that hasn't been cleaned in quite a while, and they carry men out of the Mess Hall after the first corn flake each morning. Movies arrive every three weeks by Pony Express, and the mail is flown in by carrier pigeons. Yesterday, a pigeon took a look at the camp and turned right around and went back. At least that's *my* story—and maybe that's why I haven't heard from you guys. Why don't you write? I had a long letter from Dave the other

day. He likes bombardiering fine, and is dropping his eggs like an eagle. I came out on top of the class in all forms of flexible gunnery, so I guess I'm doing all right, too. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't mind this place at all, if there was a white woman within fifty miles. Just to look at, of course. Well, keep 'em flying, you guys, and if you need the best damn turret gunner in the Air Corps, let me know a few days in advance."

The last scene in the play takes place on one of the Pacific Islands. The scene represents the inside of a Fortress with all the men at their positions, ready to take off on a mission over enemy territory. On the interphone the pilot checks with the bombardier, the radio operator, the two waist gunners, the tail gunner.

Then, turning to the engineer, Allan, the pilot, says:

Did you top the tank, Sergeant?

ENGINEER

Yes, sir. Full load of gas.

ALLAN

All clear on the right?

IRVING

Clear on the right.

ALLAN

O.K. boosters on; energize Number 1. (The Inertia Starter starts whinnying.) Mesh. (The engine misses.) Come on, baby, don't fail me now.

Finally the engine catches. The roar of the motor starts. Allan makes the traditional pilot's gesture to Irving beside him and the Engineer in back of him. The Engineer, in turn, turns and makes the gesture to Allan, "Everything okay." Allan is speaking to Irving, who laughs, but the roar of the motor drowns out the words. Then, Allan's Fortress with its crew slowly begins to move into the wild blue yonder.

Gradually, another sound is heard. It comes softly over the roar of the motors, then swells until it drowns out everything else. It is the Air Corps song being sung, and above the plane in the night sky there is a vision of another graduation. On and on the cadets come to receive their Wings. Comrades of the crew in the Fortress, young men of the air, young men of the world, young men of the U. S. Army Air Force.

#### CORRECTION

The courtesy line for the April Issue frontispiece should have read "Courtesy Westinghouse."